

SECTION I

CONTEXT

- 1.1 Sociodemographic context
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Section summary

The population of the World Health Organization's (WHO) African Region was estimated to be 1 120 161 000 in 2020 and about 14.4% of the world's population of 7 758 157 000. It was 8 billion in 2021¹. It is the third largest population among the WHO regions after South-East Asia and the Western Pacific. Between 2019 and 2020, the population differential was equivalent to that of a state of more than 28 million inhabitants. The five most populated countries account for more than 45% of the Region's population. Among these, Nigeria and the Democratic Republic of the Congo represent about 50% of the population of the West African and Central African subregions, respectively, and Ethiopia represents about 20% of the population of the East and Southern Africa subregions.

The average annual population growth in Africa was 2.5% in 2020. If the heterogeneity of the population growth between the regions of the world and between countries in the same subregion is considered, countries from East and Southern Africa subregions seem to have lower population growth rates than countries in other large subregions, which show significantly higher increases. The current population density of Africa is low, estimated to be 36 inhabitants per km² for the whole continent. However, many areas are uninhabitable and some countries have relatively large populations. High population density is a concern that must be addressed through policies, because it could generate surges and high concentrations of populations in mega cities and urban slums, which can be an issue when it comes to accessing various qualitative services.

Gross domestic product (GDP) reflects a country's resources and therefore its potential to provide access to services to its people, particularly health services. This dynamic creates a circle, with healthier people going to work and contributing to the production of wealth for the benefit of the country. The most vulnerable people live from agriculture in rural areas, or in conflict-affected states. Difficulties in accessing health services, low education and inequalities between men and women are additional obstacles to poverty reduction.

The population of sub-Saharan Africa is expected to almost double over the next three decades, growing from 1.15 billion in 2022 to 2.09 billion in 2050. The world's population is expected to grow from 7.94 billion at present to 8.51 billion in 2030 and 9.68 billion in 2050.

The demographic dividend² for African countries will emanate from the acceleration of economic growth following a decrease in fertility with a change in the structure of the age pyramid where the active population, that is those aged 18–65 years, will be more important, reaching a certain optimum to make positive the ratio between the population able to finance health and education systems and the population that benefits from these systems. This is the human capital for development at a given moment. The demographic dividend appears to be an opportunity and an invitation to action, but it is also a real challenge, that of creating sustainable jobs to generate the development to activate the economic growth lever.

1 World Population Prospects. The 2022 Revision

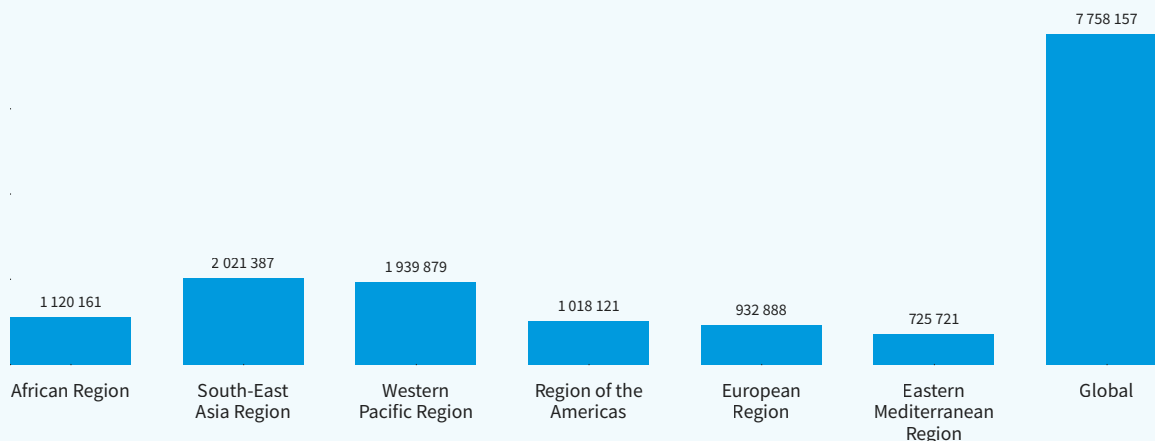
2 Population Reference Bureau (2013)

1.1 Sociodemographic context

Population

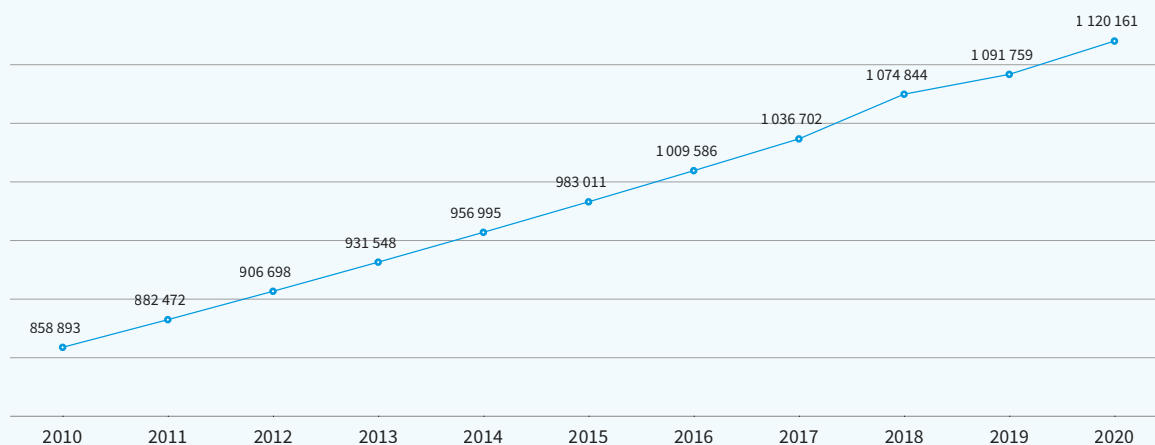
The population of the WHO African Region was estimated to be 1 120 161 000 in 2020, which was about 14.4% of the world’s population of 7 758 157 000. It is the third largest population among the WHO regions after South-East Asia and the Western Pacific regions.

Figure 1.1.1. Population of the WHO regions in 2020 (in thousands), WHO



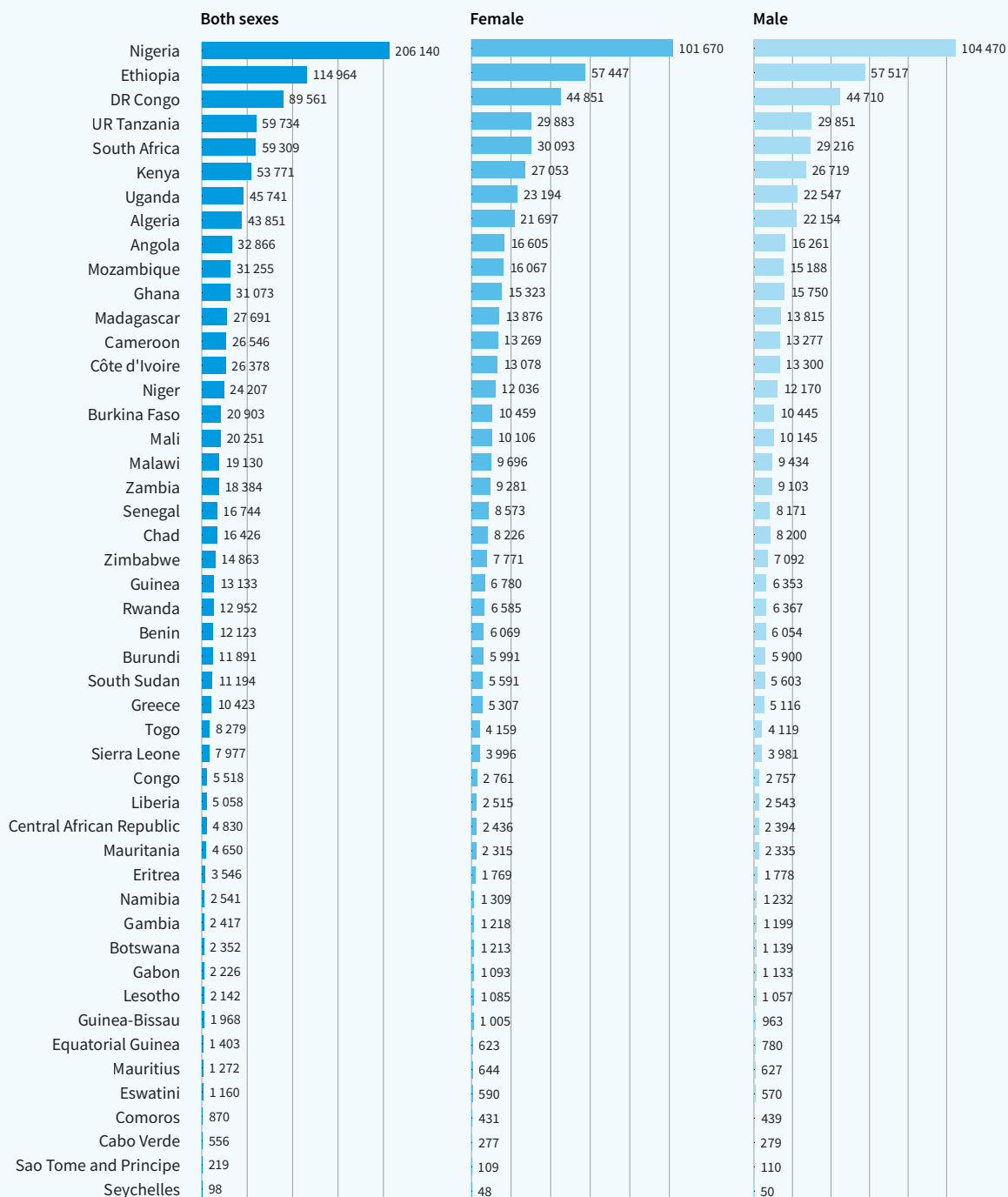
Based on United Nations data, there has been a continuous evolution of the population over the 10 years from 2011 to 2020, with its level rising by 26.9% during that period. For the single year of 2019–2020, the African population differential was equivalent to that of a country of more than 28 million inhabitants, which was well above the average population of the 47 countries in the Region, that is 23.0008 million.

Figure 1.1.2. Trend in population size (in thousands) in the WHO African Region, 2010–2020, UN Population



Nigeria, with 18% of the Region’s population, has over 200 million people. Next is Ethiopia with 114 million people and then the Democratic Republic of the Congo with 89 million people. Along with the United Republic of Tanzania and South Africa, these countries account for more than 45% of the Region’s people.

Figure 1.1.3. Population size (in thousands) of the countries in the WHO African Region, 2020, UN Population



Nigeria, Ethiopia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the three most populous countries, represent more than 45% of the population of their regional economic community, that is the Economic Community of West African States in the case Nigeria and the Economic Community of Central African States in the case of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

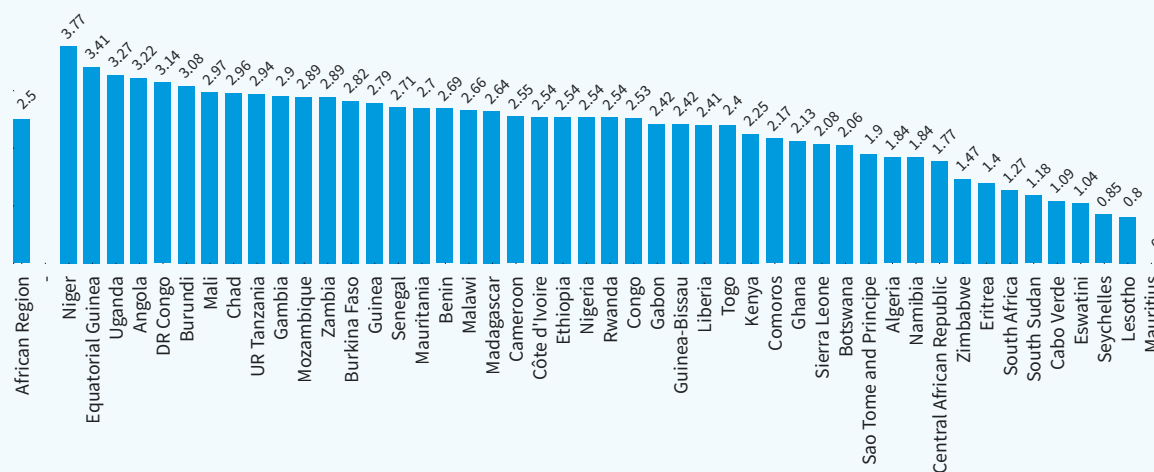
Demographic growth, country size and population density

Between 2015 and 2020, sub-Saharan Africa was said to have had the highest population growth with a rate of 2.7% compared with the global average of 1.1%,³ the North African and Middle Eastern average of 1.8%, the Latin American and the Caribbean average of 1%, the South Asian average of 1.3%, the East Asian, the Pacific average of 0.7%, and OECD countries' average of 0.3%. The 2020 average population growth in Africa was 2.5%.

Europe and North America, which have populations comparable to that of the WHO African Region, have had population growth rates of less than 1% since the mid-1960s, dropping to near zero in 2021, while sub-Saharan Africa's population growth rate peaked at 3% in 1978 and remained above 2.8% through the 1980s. The population of the Region is expected to grow at 2.5% by 2022, which is more than three times the world average of 0.8% and the highest among the WHO regions.

Despite the heterogeneity of population growth across the regions and between countries in the same subregion, Angola, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Niger and Uganda have population growth rates of above 3%. Fertility remains high in African countries, particularly in those where population growth is among the highest, that is Angola, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Niger.

Figure 1.1.4. Demographic growth (%), in the WHO African Region, 2020, World Bank



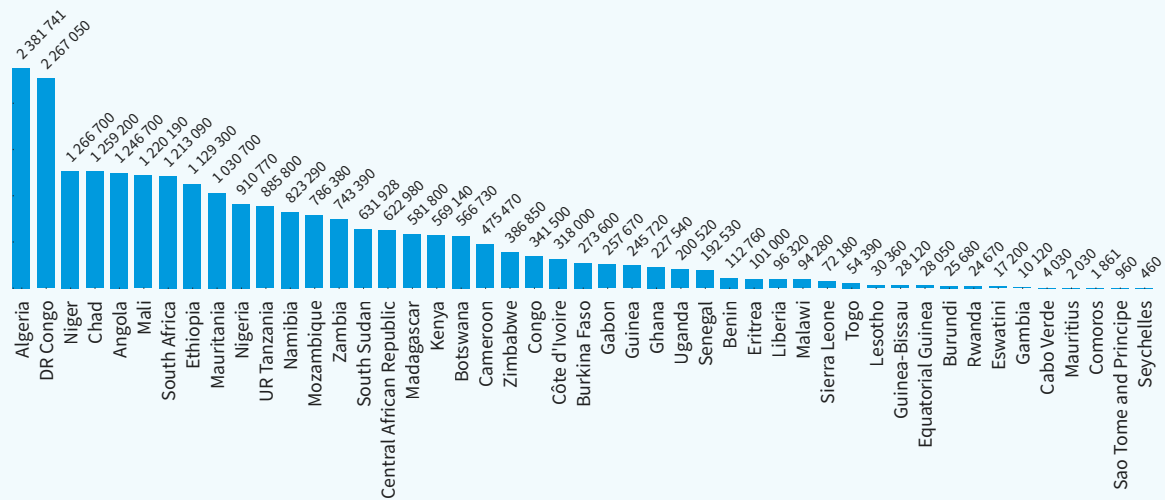
Population growth is explained by two demographic factors: the rate of natural increase of people, or the natural balance, which is the difference between births and deaths, and migratory movements, which reflect the difference between emigration and immigration. Migration has lesser weight than the natural increase of people in the demographic dynamics of Africa. In the face of the forecasts on resources, the current growth rates pose a challenge.

Population explosion can bring enormous challenges in provision of education, health and employment services, in particular. Unemployment rates are very high in most of the countries, even among graduates. Forward-looking analysis of population growth and evidence-based planning can help mitigate the negative effects of the population boom.

Countries in the East and Southern Africa subregions such as South Africa with a population growth rate of 1.3, Zimbabwe with a rate of 1.5% and Kenya with a rate of 2.4% seem to have lower population growth rates than those in the West and Central Africa subregions.

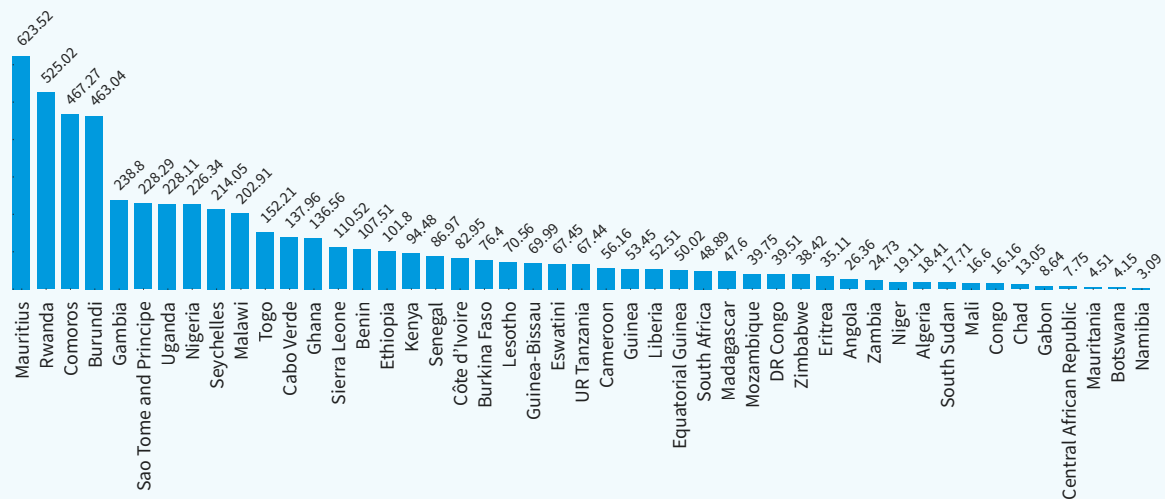
3 According to UN regions (2019)

Figure 1.1.5. Country size (km²) in the WHO African Region, 2020, World Bank



The countries' sizes and their numbers of inhabitants are not related and the largest countries do not necessarily have the greatest populations. Even the smaller countries like Burundi and Rwanda have relatively large populations. Seychelles, an ocean archipelago made up of 115 islands, is Africa's smallest country. It has a population of about 98 000.

Figure 1.1.6. Population density in 2020 (persons per km²) in the WHO African Region, 2020, World Bank



The current population density of 36 inhabitants per km² for the whole continent is not very high overall, but many areas are uninhabitable while in others the population density is very high, for example in Nigeria, where it already reaches 190 inhabitants per km².

High population density can be a concern to be addressed through policies if it contributes to surges and high concentrations of populations in mega cities and urban slums or if it hinders access to various qualitative services. The challenges of cities such as Lagos with 20 million people, Kinshasa 14 with million or Luanda can be enormous, particularly in the ghettos, where the living conditions are miserable. Some examples are Kibera in Nairobi, Pikine near Dakar and Soweto in Johannesburg, which are cities growing beside large cities, where the inhabitants live in a context marked by social exclusion, without access to basic services and in deplorable sanitary conditions. The slums are the real gateways for people who immigrate into the cities to find a better life. The high concentration of the population exposes them to many health risks but without providing them access to the most basic rights.

BOX 1. Demographic dividend

Demographic dividend is a demographic transition or a total dynamic process that combines space and time, urbanisation and family composition, enhancing human capital and therefore economic development, resulting from the “Asian economic miracle.”⁴ It is demographic and economic analysis from the experience of Asian countries which consists in the acceleration of economic growth that may result from a rapid decline in a country’s fertility, and subsequent changes in the age structure of the population⁵.

Demographic dividend represents the economic chance offered by the situation in which a country reaches its maximum in the ratio between the non-dependent (active) population and the dependent population (the youngest and the oldest). This is the tipping point where children (boys and girls under 18) and people over 64, currently representing more than 50% of the population, will become less numerous than the working age population, that is people aged 18–64 years. Half of Africa’s population currently is under 18 years of age. By 2035, however, the continent’s working population will be larger than of any other region. The dependency ratio, that is children and retirees that each worker supports, will then fall to a level comparable to that of the United States or Europe.

School attendance is also increasing and by 2035⁶ university graduates are expected to account for almost 10% of the African population. But the African workforce is still largely under educated, which poses a problem for the integration of individuals into the labour market. According to Africa’s economic prospects,⁷ tens of millions of jobs will need to be created each year to absorb all the new entrants into the labour market. Beyond these considerations, however, the age at which the economic surplus begins to be created varies by region, being later in the WHO African Region, with subregional variations. We therefore refer to the global deficit over the life cycle, estimated to be between 20% and 40% of GDP.

4 John F. May and Jean-Pierre Guengant; Demography and economic emergence of sub-Saharan Africa, 2000

5 Population Reference Bureau (2013)

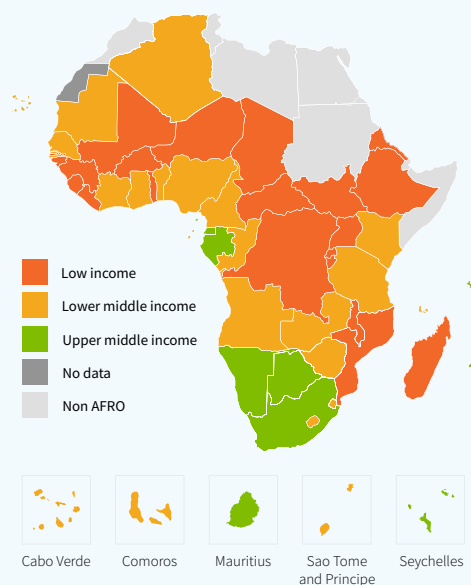
6 Rodrigo Deiana, Arthur Minsat (OCDE, Paris). Labor market consequences of Africa’s demographic dividend, 2018

7 Africa’s economic prospects, 2017

1.2 Economic context

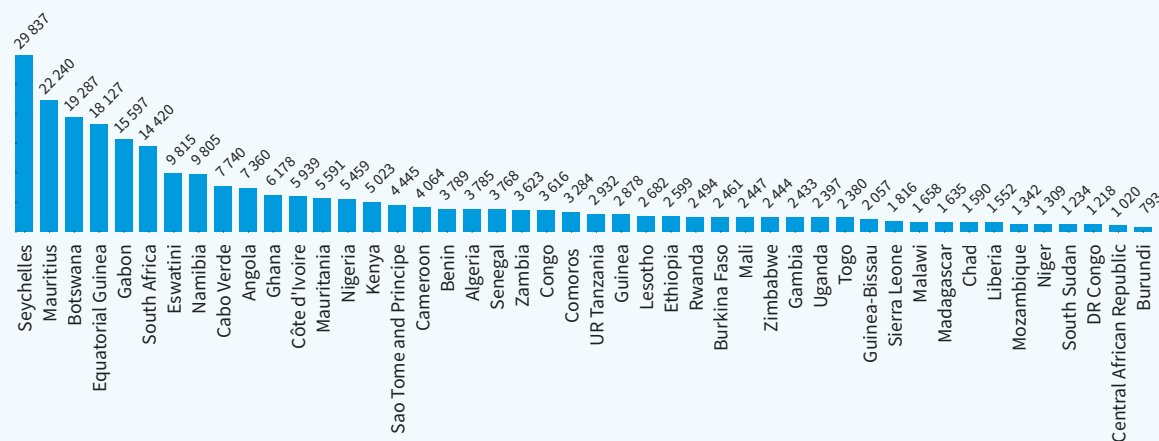
GDP per capita

Figure 1.2.1. Map of GDP per capita (Int \$) in the WHO African Region, 20201, World Bank



GDP per capita is an indicator that gives a complementary view of a country’s level of development. The figure 1.2.1 illustrates the GDP per capita for each country, adjusted for purchasing power. According to the latest IMF⁸ estimates for 2022, the leading economies in terms of GDP per capita (constant US\$) in the WHO African Region are Nigeria (\$510.6bn), South Africa (\$426.2bn), Algeria (\$193.6bn), Angola (\$124.9bn) and Kenya (\$114.7bn).

Figure 1.2.2. Country-specific GDP per capita (Int \$) in the WHO African Region, 2021, World Bank



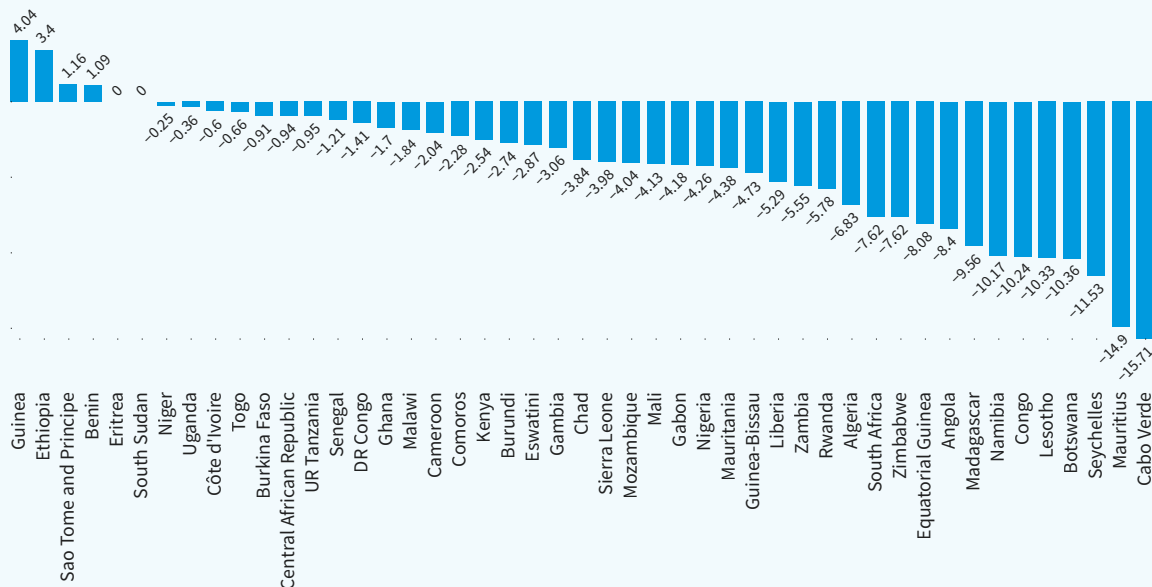
GDP reflects the country’s resources and therefore access to services, particularly health services, and their availability. This dynamic creates a virtuous circle, with healthier people going to work and contributing to the production of wealth for the benefit of the country. Gross National Income per capita remains low. Most African Region countries have not reached a level of per capita income that allows significant economic dynamics, compared to the rest of the world.

Nigeria ranks 26th among the world’s richest countries and, with its estimated GDP (constant US\$) of US\$ 510 billion in 2022, it is the richest African nation, according to the IMF. Its GDP grows by 2.7% year on year. Nigeria’s GDP (in constant terms) is around 200 times that of countries such as Gambia and the Central African Republic.

8 IMF, Rethinking fiscal policy: public finance and equity in a transformed world. Finance & Development, International Monetary Fund Quarterly, March 2022, 59.

Economic growth rate

Figure 1.2.3. GDP growth (annual %) in the WHO African Region, 2020, World Bank



Most countries saw their GDP decline between 2019 and 2020, and only four have been doing well.

After growing by 6.9% in 2021, Africa’s GDP is expected to slow down to 4.1% in 2022. Adding to the damage caused by the COVID-19 pandemic with its successive lockdowns in China, the conflict in Ukraine and its disruption of supply chains has exacerbated the slowdown in the global economy, which is entering a prolonged period of low growth and high inflation, according to the latest World Bank Global Economic Outlook (2022). Global growth is expected to fall from 5.7% in 2021 to 2.9% in 2022 and further to 2.2% in 2023, largely owing to the continued removal of fiscal and monetary support measures introduced during the pandemic. In emerging markets and developing economies, growth is also expected to fall from 6.6% in 2021 to 3.4% in 2022, well below the annual average of 4.8% seen over the 2011–2019 period.

In sub-Saharan Africa, growth is expected to moderate to 3.7% in 2022 and 3.8% in 2023. Sub-Saharan Africa is expected to remain as the only emerging and developing region where per capita incomes will not return to their 2019 levels even by 2023. Higher food and fuel import bills could also reverse the recent progress made in the fight against poverty in the Region, particularly in the countries with large vulnerable populations and in countries that are highly dependent on food imports. The health and economic crises feed off each other. For example, according to WHO (2021) forecasts, the continent may have to wait until 2024 to reach 70% COVID-19 immunisation coverage.

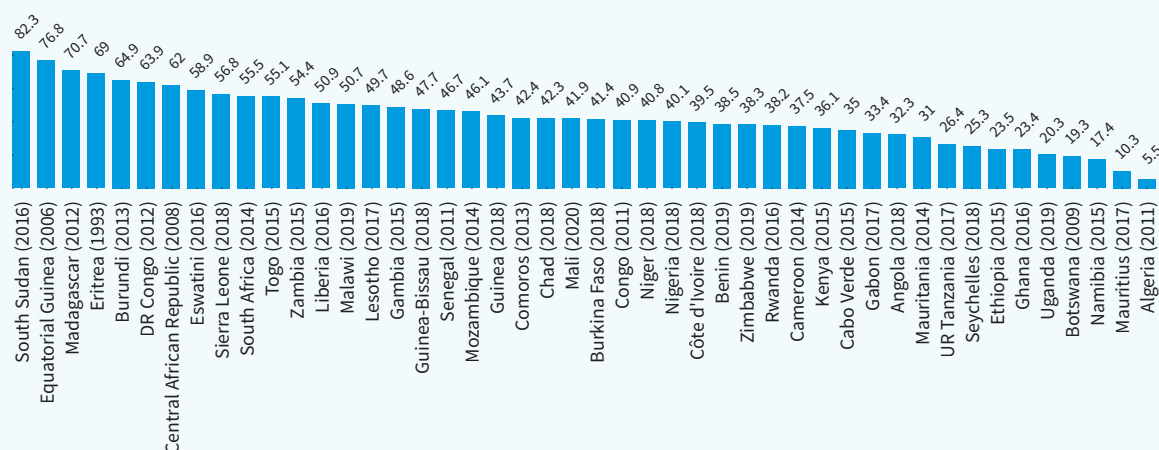
Inflation and poverty rates

Inflation reflects the loss of purchasing power in a country and the rise in prices and is, therefore, a reliable indicator of the economic health of a country. The rise of the inflation rate can be a disadvantageous indicator of health investments for a country. Estimates show the growth momentum in the Region’s three largest economies of Nigeria, Angola and South Africa to have continued. For Angola and Nigeria, this is attributed to the high oil prices and the recovery of the non-resource sectors.

In the Region as a whole, persistent and high domestic inflation rates, power cuts and food and fuel shortages have weighed on recovery. In some countries, debt overhang, political uncertainty, social unrest and violence continue to undermine recovery, particularly in fragile and conflict-affected low-income countries.

Although the rising commodity prices are likely to support the recovery in the extractive industries, the rising inflation in many countries will tend to erode real incomes, weaken demand and increase poverty. Food price inflation and shortages are expected to hit vulnerable populations hard, further exacerbating food insecurity.

Figure 1.2.4. Poverty rate (%) in the WHO African Region, 2020, World Bank

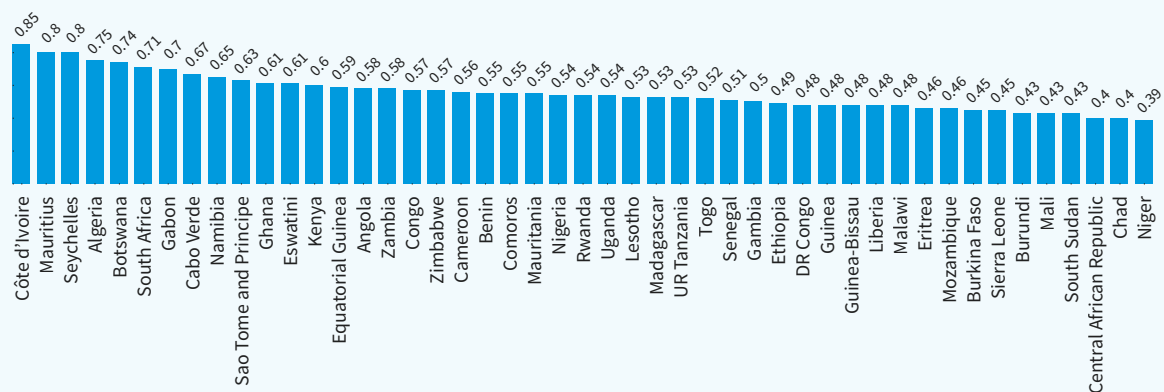


The poverty rate in Africa has declined, but the number of poor people has increased. The pandemic has undermined progress in poverty reduction in Africa, pushing at least 29 million more people into extreme poverty (Mahler et al., 2021). The World Bank predicts that by 2030, if nothing is done by decision-makers to address this issue, nine out of 10 poor people in the world will be African.

The most vulnerable people live on agriculture in rural areas or in conflict-affected states. Difficulties in health systems, low education and inequalities between men and women are additional obstacles to poverty reduction.

Human development index

Figure 1.2.5. Human development index in the WHO African Region, 2019, UNDP



In addition to dealing with the exigencies of the demographic transition, access to basic health care, strengthening education especially for young girls, ensuring economic autonomy of women and promoting agriculture, the development of various activities in the rural world must be taken in hand by the communities in the countries.

The United Nations promotes sustainable development and peace in Africa by helping to accelerate the integrated implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the African Union's Agenda 2063. In terms of the human development index (HDI), Africa has made significant progress, but strong inequalities remain.⁹ Poverty, conflict and illiteracy remain major challenges (Beegle et al., 2016). Côte d'Ivoire comes first in the HDI ranking, even ahead of the island states.

HDI, a composite index based on the three indicators of life expectancy, education and income, certainly has had significant progress in certain countries, in particular thanks to the progress in access to drinking water, sanitation, hygiene, etc. But the progress made could be reversed if efforts are not made to face the threats linked to climate change and inequalities.

⁹ Tabapssi, T.F. Africa facing global economic and strategic challenges: realities and perspectives. Presence Africaine 2019, 1–2(199–200):9–110.

BOX 2. Population forecasts

The United Nations¹⁰ estimates that the world population will reach 8 billion people in 2022, and the population of sub-Saharan Africa is expected to almost double by 2050. Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially those related to health, education and gender equality, will help reduce fertility levels and slow global population growth. In most countries of sub-Saharan Africa, the share of the working age population has increased due to the recent reductions in fertility.

This change in the age pyramid offers an opportunity to accelerate per capita economic growth,¹¹ or generate the demographic dividend. This should motivate countries to invest in the development of their human capital through providing access to health care and quality education at all ages and by promoting opportunities for productive employment and decent work. Very often, demographic projections in Africa are underestimated owing to the underestimation of the decline in mortality and life expectancy and the overestimation of the decline in fertility. The risk of child mortality has fallen sharply.

1.3 Health system organisation structure

Regions, provinces and health districts

Table 1.3.1. Number of regions or provinces and health districts in the WHO African Region, 2000–2020, WHO/Regional Office for Africa

Year	Country	Regions or Provinces	Health districts	
2000	Benin	12	77	
	Equatorial Guinea	7	18	
	Eritrea	6	58	
	Gabon	10	51	
	Gambia	7	7	
	Lesotho	10	10	
	Liberia	15	15	
	Mauritius	11	11	
	Namibia	13	35	
	Nigeria	37	769	
	Rwanda	5	30	
	Sao Tome and Principe	2	7	
	Seychelles	6	15	
	Eswatini	4	4	
Zimbabwe	10	63		
2011	South Sudan	10	80	
2016	Burkina Faso	13	70	
	DR Congo	26	519	
2017	Central African Republic	7	35	
	Mozambique	11	161	
2019	Algeria	48	48	
	Angola	18	170	
	Botswana	24	24	
	Cabo Verde	9	22	
2019	Comoros	3	17	
	Ghana	16	260	
	Guinea	8	38	
	Madagascar	22	114	
	Mali	11	75	
	Mauritania	15	57	
	South Africa	9	52	
	Togo	6	44	
	UR Tanzania	31	195	
	2020	Burundi	18	47
		Cameroon	10	190
Chad		23	126	
Congo		12	52	
Côte d'Ivoire		33	113	
Ethiopia		11	104	
Guinea-Bissau		11	11	
Kenya		47	311	
Malawi		3	28	
Niger		8	73	
Senegal		14	78	
Sierra Leone		5	16	
Uganda	15	135		
Zambia	10	109		

10 World population prospects, 2022

11 Tabutin, D., Bruno Schoumaker, B. the demography of sub-Saharan Africa in the 21st Century: review of changes from 2000 to 2020, prospects and challenges to 2050. Population 2020, 2–3(75): 169–295.

There is no direct relationship between the size of a country or the number of regions and the number of health districts. A country like Gabon with nine inhabitants/km² that is nearly twice as small as the neighbouring Cameroon, which has 58 inhabitants/km² and 10 times Gabon's population, has the same number of regions as Cameroon. Gabon has also the same number of regions and health districts as South Africa, which is about 4.5 times larger in area and has 30 times its population and nearly 50 inhabitants/km².

By 2050, demographic changes and rapid urbanisation with more than 1.1 billion Africans living in cities will occur, but Africa has 160 million urban dwellers living in informal settlements and slums; nearly a third of its population without access to clean water, sanitation, energy or mobility facilities; and 200 million young people about to enter the labour market but with little hope of finding decent work. In such a context, local and regional authorities or regions and municipalities, are often in the front line.¹² They are the first public authorities to have to deal with the consequences of situations arising from poverty and delays in the provision of infrastructure and basic services. This is also why most African local and regional governments welcomed the adoption of the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs and considered it as a possible way to make up for lost time in improving the living conditions of African populations, so that no one is left behind. The internal organisation of countries and the very diverse realities explain the creation of health districts. It is about the supply of health care services and their availability in the country and the level of income of the population.

The “United cities and local government report” highlights the key actions to integrate local and regional authorities in the implementation of the SDGs. These include better management of urbanisation and the interconnection of villages, medium-sized cities and large towns; allocation of adequate financial resources, combining decentralisation of powers with decentralisation of resources; and the creation of a network of local authorities.

12 United Cities and Local Governments. The localisation of global agendas: how local action is transforming cities and territories. GOLD V Regional Report on Africa, 2020.

References

- 1 World Population Prospects. The 2022 Revision
- 2 Population Reference Bureau (2013)
- 3 According to UN regions (2019)
- 4 John F. May and Jean-Pierre Guengant; Demography and economic emergence of sub-Saharan Africa, 2000
- 5 Population Reference Bureau (2013)
- 6 Rodrigo Deiana, Arthur Minsat (OCDE, Paris). Labour market consequences of Africa's demographic dividend, 2018
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- 8 IMF, Rethinking fiscal policy: public finance and equity in a transformed world. Finance & Development, International Monetary Fund Quarterly, March 2022, 59.
- 9 Tabapssi, T.F. Africa facing global economic and strategic challenges: realities and perspectives. Presence Africaine 2019, 1–2(199–200):9–110.
- 10 World population prospects, 2022
- 11 Tabutin, D., Bruno Schoumaker, B. the demography of sub-Saharan Africa in the 21st Century: review of changes from 2000 to 2020, prospects and challenges to 2050. Population 2020, 2–3(75): 169–295.
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